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ABSTRACT

This paper asserts the importance of allowing children to use their own perceptions in developing their imagination and drawing skills. It discusses why children draw, and how teachers can foster creativity, create appropriate activities, and evaluate the child's progress. Children draw to symbolically explore their worlds, and that by the age of 3 or 4, most children are able to master the necessary skills for presenting their own ideas about reality in observable symbolic form. The creativeness of children can flourish only in an environment that provides: respect along with freedom for exploration and risk-taking; a rich experimental curriculum; adequate space for children's projects and materials; sufficient, or at least flexible, time; and a sincere, mature, and sensitive adult. Art activities should be chosen with the same rationale that child development specialists use to select toys for children: they should be open-ended and provide a variety of options. The paper concludes by discussing interviews with eight teachers in day care and Head Start programs about children's spontaneous drawings, and an analysis of four children's drawings. Some teachers indicated they did not have enough time to fully support children's drawing. (EV)

The Role of Spontaneous Drawing in the Development of Children in the Early Childhood Settings

Fatima Y. Collado
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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explain the importance of allowing children to use their own perceptions in developing their imagination and drawing skills. A selected case study of children with whom I have worked is presented. Additionally, teachers were interviewed to see their perceptions of spontaneous drawing. The case study indicated that teachers do not have enough time to closely observe the child's work.

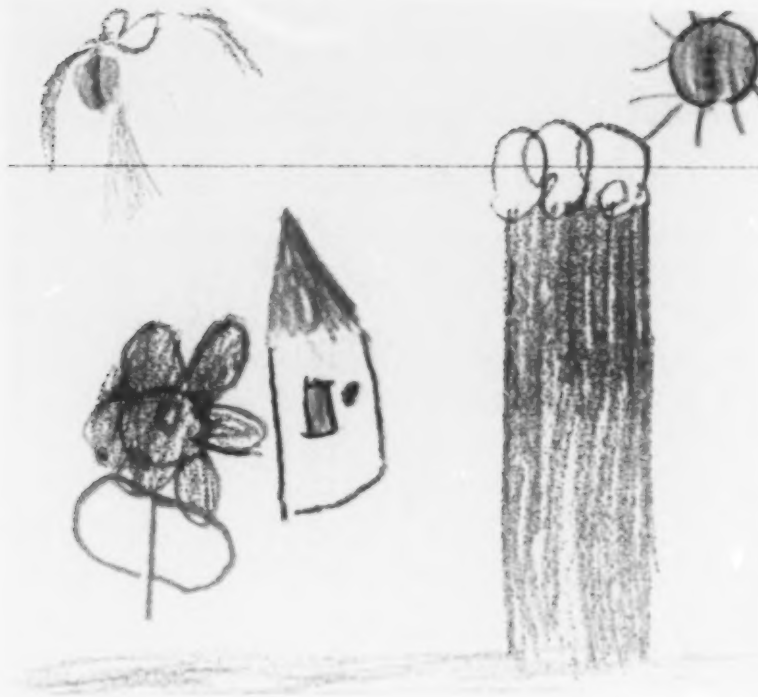
Introduction

Spontaneous drawing is the art that comes from the child's own desire to create. It discloses a set of symbols through which the child might present and experiment with personal and developing ideas about himself about his world. Children have the capacity to think, to feel, to respond, and to create in order words to use their senses fully. Children are creative and productive whenever we give them the opportunity (Mazzil & Marzan, 1981, p. 3). It is exciting to watch active young children studying the

world around them. A couple of things become clear almost immediately. First of all, children are full of curiosity. They seem to enjoy investigating and finding out things. Second, they seem quite capable of doing this successfully. They are very creative in finding answers to problems that arise from the curiosity. Young children must be free to develop all these natural abilities that make each child so uniquely different (Mayesky, 1995, p. 2).

Childhood is a time of wonder, a time when a child instinctively know how to create his own development. No one has to teach him what to do. He explores and uses his imagination in play, and we can trust him to follow the same creative development sequence as every other normally healthy child. Given broadly the same set of circumstances, ways of play may vary, but each child plays similarly, with a purpose and for a reason (Mashedier, 1994, p. 128).

Spontaneous drawing activities, whether they are performed alone or with others, occur in the lives of some children daily and yet often go virtually unnoticed by parents, teachers, or other adults. But anything that so fills the lives of young children is not without consequences, both in the flavor the pleasure and excitement it provides to children's daily lives and in the effect it has on their learning about the world, themselves, and the future (Wilson, 1982, p.10).



By a five-year old

Why Children Draw

According to experts, children draw to symbolically explore their worlds. By the age of three or four most children are able to master the necessary for presenting their own ideas about reality in observable symbolic form. Years before they can set down their original ideas in writing and numbers, children are able to record their ideas, feelings, and experiences through their drawings (Wilson, 1982, p. 23). Children begin their drawing and modeling

in a way that some educational researchers and others label "scribbling." It is the period of exploration before the eyes and hands are fully coordinated, before the drawing represents a specific object or idea, before the drawing is named by the child, and before the subject of a drawing can be recognized or identified by teachers or parents. It is a time when muscular coordination is developing and when children are trying to coordinate hand and eye activities. This is an essential stage in creative development. Children need the time, materials, and the encouragement to scribble (Mattil & Marzan, 1981, p. 5).

I feel that as a pre-k teacher I understand the importance of allowing children to use their self-expression to draw. Teachers need to believe in the children's creative ability. We have to respect their ideas and their own aesthetic value. The teacher who is aware and appreciates differences in children and children's creative drawing and painting will provide the climate where creativeness can flourish. The teacher will use art as a positive outlet for children's ideas and feelings and as a means of helping

children to understand themselves and others (Wilson, 1982, p.35).

A look at some philosophies of educational researchers and theorists will be used to explain the philosophy of this case study. Dewey and Piaget believed that young children learn best through interaction with concrete objects and materials (Worthman, 1994, p. 34). It was Piaget's belief that the nature of the experiences provided to a child during the first five years of life was crucial to his intellectual development. He believed that children constructed knowledge through active interaction with the environment (Worthman, 1994, p. 35).

How teachers can foster creativity in the early childhood classroom.

Creativity is the process of being original, spontaneous, and/or unique. Perhaps the most important thing for the student to realize about creativity is that everyone possesses a certain amount of it. Some people are a little more creative, some a little less. No one is totally uncreative (Mayesky, 1995, p. 3). Teachers cannot make

children be creative. However, the teacher can provide a classroom that displays the appropriate attitude, the appropriate atmosphere, and the appropriate activities and materials for those children who wish to explore or demonstrate creative expression (Smith, 1996, p. 162).

The creativeness of children can flourish only in an environment that provides respect with freedom for exploration and risk taking; a rich experimental curriculum; adequate space for children's projects and materials; and sufficient, or at least flexible time. Another necessary condition is the presence of a sincere, mature, and sensitive adult (Young Children, 1998, p. 4). Too many teachers under-emphasize own creativity. And even worse, many teachers feel that because they find inspiration from suggested activities in books, they really aren't being creative. While you may find creative activities in books you are still the source of creativity in your classroom (Mayesky, 1995, p. 14). The environment is just as important as the teaching strategies we use for fostering creativity in young children. if a safe and

stimulating environment that promotes creativity is provided for young children, they will routinely seek out all the possibilities I venture out to learn about their environment. The teacher's challenge is to construct a learning environment that welcomes exploration and has meaningful and necessary limits, rather than arbitrary limits that inhibit creativity (Mayesky, 1995, p. 19).

Activities based on the interests of the children are conducive to fostering creativity. Young children are capable of telling what they know about a topic of interest, what they want to know, and how they want to explore the topic (Smith, 1996, p. 165). "I have visited many elementary schools in my state, and I have seen the different approaches to art that teachers provide for young children. Some teachers provide rich, individual, and open-ended activities, while others present projects like my friend who design art activities for her students. In one classroom I visited, the teacher proudly showed off her classroom in the new school. She had covered all her bulletin boards with wrapping paper, had

selected fancy, pre-made borders, and had purchased cutouts of fall scenes, which were displayed around the room” (Young Children 1999, p. 16).



Creating appropriate activities

Planning creative activities for young children begins with an awareness of the young child. There are many questions to ask about the child, the child's environment, and the teacher's own feelings in order to plan properly. The teacher's plans need to take into consideration: (1) the children's needs and interests; (2) their developmental levels; and (3) the available materials and resources

(Mayesky, 1995, p. 62).

Art activities should be chosen with the same rationale that child development specialists use to recommend and select toys for children. They recommend that we choose toys that are open-ended, that provide a variety of options, such as blocks and Legos. Young children need many appropriate chances to make choices, children, if allowed, are extremely creative and revel in the opportunity to choose materials. Children can combine most media to provide rich, creative results. They can use markers and crayons; watercolors and crayons; markers and water; paint; and chalk. By providing open-ended experiences for a child, a teacher helps him develop self-confidence in his natural creative ability. These experiences stimulate the imagination and allow the child to think more inventively. We can encourage and praise original ideas. A child's personality and viewpoint are reflected in his natural artwork, and teachers can show respect for the child by encouraging his own way of working with art material (Young Children, 1999, p. 16-20).

A survey and analysis of drawings

I decided to interview eight teachers who work in day care and Head Start programs in the South Bronx, New York. The purpose of the interview was to gain information from a teacher's perspective on spontaneous drawing and appropriate activities for young children.

I selected a small number of teachers because they were more accessible, and willing to participate in the survey. The first step was to interview four pre-k teachers. Each classroom is designed for each age group: two, three, four five year old groups. There are twenty children in each room. The setting is the Head Start program in the South Bronx, New York.

Secondly, I interviewed four kindergarten teachers who work in day care centers in the South Bronx, New York. There are twenty-five children in each classroom.

Additionally, I assessed four preschool age children ranging from 2-5 year old. They all attended a Head Start program in the South Bronx, New York and had been at the program approximately the same amount of time, four months prior to my assessment. The children's drawings were selected arbitrarily for evidence of stage development: early scribble stage, basic forms stage, early pictorial stage and later pictorial stage.

Survey

How many years have you been a pre-k/kindergarten teacher?

Five teachers reported that they have been teaching preschool for more than five years. Three teachers reported less than 2 years.

When asked if they felt young children benefit from a preschool education?

The eight teachers reported yes.

When asked what roles the teacher can play in encouraging the used of spontaneous drawing?

The eight teachers reported that the teacher's role is to use the environment and teaching activities to facilitate learning. Five teachers said that instead of commercial, preplanned activities, they encourage children to take the initiative and make selections of activity. Three teachers reported that because they do not have enough time to plan sometimes they use preplanned activities.

When asked what is their opinion about coloring books and young children?

Five teachers reported that coloring books serve as poor models for the development of children's aesthetic tastes. Three teachers reported that coloring books help young children learn how to color.

When asked if they thought they were adequately trained to plan creative activities for young children?

Six teachers reported that they took art courses during their college years, but they feel that their knowledge is minimal. Two teaches said yes.

When asked what does the teacher see in a child's artwork?

The eight teachers reported that they see colors, shapes and symbols, but many times they do not have time at the moment to closely observe what the child is trying to express through his/her drawing.

Analysis of Children's Drawings

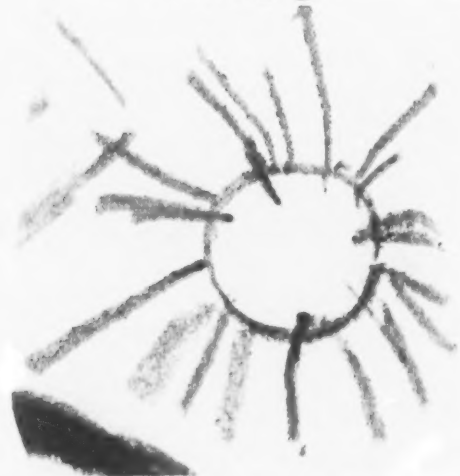
Picture A



Early Scribble Stage

Markers scribbles by a child 2 years, 6 months of age. Children's ability to scribble develops in direct relation to their ability to control their movements and to their awareness of the relationship between themselves and the space around them.

Picture B



Basic Forms Stage

In picture B, by a 3 year-old, a series of lines radiating from a circle. The child apparently recognizes his ability to use them as symbols.

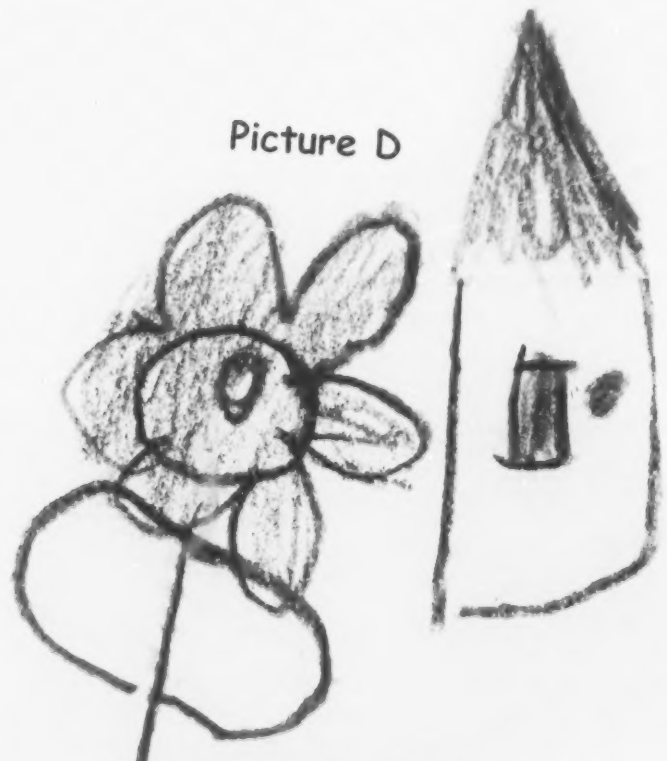
Picture C



Early Pictorial Stage

In picture C, a "self-portrait" by a 4 year-old, is a clear form of visual communication.

Picture D



Later Pictorial Stage

In picture D, by a 5 year-old, the child has used patterns, combining a flower and a house. This picture of his environment shows the child's growing need to communicate with his surroundings.

Conclusion

The schema drawn by a child represents something important to the child, something that is part of the child's environment and experience.

According to the cognitive theory, children draw what they know. Through drawing children can communicate outside themselves and with their world.

A child's artwork is very individual and expresses the child's own personality.

The basic stages of art development parallel the overall development of children at particular periods. In planning the early childhood art program, the teacher must choose appropriate activities for the ability and interest levels of the age group of children in the program.

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